

# The New Jersey Black Bear - The Good News: S2369 - Bear Smart Legislation



The four closed bins on the left are bear-resistant; the fifth, an open can is not.

## Mason Dixon (2010): 74 Percent of New Jersey Voters Prefer Non-Lethal Methods of Solving Conflicts Between Bears and Humans

According to an April, 2010 statewide survey conducted by Mason-Dixon Polling & Research, Inc. for the Humane Society of the United States:

- 74 percent of registered voters prefer that the state prioritize non-lethal methods of solving conflicts between humans and bears.
- The survey results were consistent in every geographic region of the state, with a 10 percent majority opposed to hunting bears.

Registered voters strongly oppose:

- Hunting of bear cubs under one-year of age, some of whom are still nursing.
- Killing of mother bears, or sows, with cubs, and the
- Use of bait to lure bears to locations where hunters shoot the animals while they are feeding.

The New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife permits and encourages all of the aforementioned practices.



A Bear Smart Community in Ontario, Canada.

*The good news is that efforts to reduce the availability of anthropogenic food to bears can be quite successful at reducing bear-human conflict, as evidenced by some of our case studies. An important message from the New Mexico case study is that when food was made unavailable, bears were capable of living in close proximity to humans without conflict.*

– Wildlife Conservation Society, 2008.

## Bear Smart legislation (S2369) corrects a signal failure to organize, implement, and enforce non-lethal solutions preferred by 74% of New Jersey voters.

Legislation introduced by Senator Raymond Lesniak (D-20) incorporates the best science as recommended by leading experts.

New Jersey Bear Smart Legislation:

- ◇ addresses intentional baiting of bear and deer that food conditions bears and contributes to human-bear conflict;
- ◇ requires the State to adopt amendments to the State Sanitary Code setting appropriate standards and specifications for bear-resistant dumpsters and garbage bins required by municipalities;
- ◇ requires campgrounds, closed communities and municipalities located in bear habitat to institute and enforce meaningful bear-resistant trash bin and dumpster programs;
- ◇ directs the State to provide a list of all municipalities located in bear habitat within 90 days of enactment.

Baiting for deer or bear changes the behavior of bears and leads to food conditioning and habituation to humans. Artificial feeding contributes to:

- ◇ potential conflicts and property damage;
- ◇ alterations in bear behavior and foraging habits;
- ◇ increased or sustained reproductive rate, physical size, distribution, and numbers.

Baiting has significant negative impacts on a wide range of non-target species and contributes to forest degeneration. Baiting

- ◇ concentrates deer, who then feed on natural vegetation in the area;
- ◇ attracts coyotes, raccoons, opossums and rodents, thereby increasing predation on ground-nesting birds;
- ◇ contributes to the spread of wildlife disease and exotic and invasive plants;
- ◇ increases automobile-deer collisions;
- ◇ increases illegal activity;
- ◇ improves reproduction in white-tailed deer.

(Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre 2003; Alabama Department of Natural Resources 2011).





*Bear-resistant, heavy duty commercial dumpster.*

### Management Recommendations:

- *Educating the public about keep human food from bears*
- *Requiring the public to, and providing the means to, secure food and garbage*
- *Enforcing requirements and laws*
- *Land use decisions and other strategies to keep people and bears apart*

– Wildlife Conservation Society, 2008.



*Bear resistant trash cans are available in stores and online.*

*Although in reality black bears pose little threat to human safety, they are sometimes feared.*

*The species' power in the public eye can lead to intense public safety concerns and, thus, extreme management reactions.*

*In this discussion, however, it is important to recognize that humans are a root cause of many of these issues, and that focusing on bears as a public safety threat or as an economic nuisance is largely counterproductive. To solve these problems, the central focus needs to be human behavior.*

- Wildlife Conservation Society, 2008

[http://www.northjersey.com/news/opinions/181953871\\_The\\_Record\\_No\\_more\\_hunts.html](http://www.northjersey.com/news/opinions/181953871_The_Record_No_more_hunts.html)

## The Record: No more hunts

NorthJersey.com

IF past experience can be an indication, New Jersey's third straight bear hunt that began Monday will bring home quite a harvest, leaving the state's black bear population thinned by perhaps 400 or more bears by the time it finishes on Saturday.

It's too bad more creativity cannot be brought into the conversation to find a more humane solution to the state's "black bear problem." Despite the court-approved "bear management plan," we continue to believe there must be a better way to address the bear nuisance scenario than simply to order their wholesale slaughter in early December of every year. And let's face it, given the "baiting" that is allowed to lure bears to would-be hunters, whatever sport

there once was has been taken away. To quote state Sen. Raymond Lesniak, D-Union, it's "like shooting fish in a barrel."

Lesniak is sponsor of a sensible bill that would ban baiting and require a more strict trash management program in "Bear Country," the mostly northwestern parts of the state where the bear population has made its resurgence after being close to extinction in New Jersey 40 years ago. Last year's hunt netted 469 kills, and the state Department of Environmental Protection predicts similar numbers this year.

The DEP estimates that overall black bear numbers are down from the last two years, from 3,400 to between 2,800 and 3,000. Hunt advocates point to other figures, as well, showing there have been fewer "bear incidents," including attempted home entry and livestock deaths since the hunts were reinstated by the Christie administration.

These numbers are still comparatively small, and the nature of the hunt is that the more dangerous bears, i.e., Category One bears, can be taken along with less-aggressive bears that have made little if any human contact, and that will retreat into the woods during the hunt.

Certainly, we understand that the bear-human interaction is a complicated problem that needs to be constantly monitored and addressed. In our view, however, a yearly hunt should not be the first option, the driver of any so-called management plan. Rather, we would like to see the state go back to less drastic measures, implementing the harvesting only once other methods of control have been exhausted.

*North Jersey Media Group Inc.*